Ig Dew G-2 (1869-1878) 1878 AVI Kashmir AVI

slack, one harvest having been got in and seed-time for the next not having come. The plan is to provide what is called a surrad, a goat-skin carefully taken off and carefully closed wherever an opening occurred; the end of one fore leg only is left open for inflating; the skin is blown out tight, and the end fastened up with a bit of string; to the hind legs are attached loops through which the man puts his bare legs, and the stiff inflated goat-skin comes up in front of his chest; then, jumping into the river, the man balances himself on the surrad, lying almost flat along it; by aid of his hands and a peculiar motion of his feet he can swim along at a fine rate, and fears not to trust himself to the waves and the rapids of the swollen river. Standing at a spot whence he knows the current will force him out to mid-channel, he waits till a log of timber comes opposite him, and, dashing in, he soon reaches it, and then, by the exertion both of force and skill, guides it to a sheltered nook where it may be landed and hauled up. The places convenient for this are known, and men are kept ready at each to receive the logs as they are caught, while a munsif is by to measure the timber, and give a note of its length and girth to the swimmer, who swims away with it in his turban to look out for another log. The notes representing the day's or the week's work he will bring at his leisure to the office at Akhnúr, and receive payment in proportion to the cubic contents of the timber he has brought in.

There are some thirty stations for this work within the space mentioned, including several in the branch channels below Akhnúr. A log that passes the upper ones will pretty surely be caught below; even at night, between the late summer evening and the early dawn, the timber can hardly get through the whole space before some early bird is down upon it to bring it in.

Some of the timber comes from as far away as the Chamba territory, above Pádar, where the Panjáb Forest Department fell it, having taken a lease of the Chamba Raja's forests. Some was felled by the Maharaja's Forest Department, of which for a few years I had the management. Some other belongs to contractors, to whom the right of felling has been sold. These different

4a Durand G-8 (1889-92) 1900 AVI Kashmir AVI

clothed with forest, at one time through the terraced fields of rich rice cultivation, at another through thickets of lilac, barberry, and hazel, and at another through the forest itself, here composed of magnificent deodars. Ruins of Buddhist temples by the roadside—some of them of great interest, and in a fair state of preservation—bear witness here, as do other remains on every well-known natural line of communication throughout the Hindu-Kush and Northern India, to the widespread power of the creed once ruling from Kandahar and Kabul to Bengal, of which now, throughout the continent of India, scarcely a trace remains, except in time-worn stones.

The valley of Kashmir, which is about eighty miles long by twenty broad, contains and leads to some of the most beautiful scenery in the world. Shut in by a great circle of snowy mountains, traversed by a fine river running through richly cultivated lands, adorned by a chain of lovely lakes, watered by a thousand streams, covered with numerous villages embowered in every species of fruit-tree, with lake and stream bordered by plane-trees, the magnificent "chenar," dear to the Mogul Emperors, and planted by them wherever they loved to dwell, the vale of Kashmir is, outwardly at least, the earthly paradise of the East.

The traveller generally leaves Baramulla in the evening, and his barge is paddled and towed up by sunset to a spot where boats tie up for the night. From this point, at early dawn, a start is made to cross the Woollar Lake. This great stretch of water has an evil name among the boatmen, for it is subject to swift and terrible storms, against which the keel-

4 Durand G-3 (1888-92) 1900 AVI Kashmir AVI

less boats, with their heavy top hamper of mat roofs, cannot possibly make head. It is an unpleasant experience to be caught in a storm on the lake. All that is feasible in this case is to drift with the wind, paddling as rapidly as possible towards the nearest reed bed, and to tie up there till the storm is past; but many a boat caught in the open lake has been swamped, and the boatmen are full of tales of shipwreck. By starting before sunrise it is possible, however, to cross by mid-day to the other side of the lake, where the river flows into it, and storms as a rule do not come down till after-noon.

The scene as your boat steals out into the lake an hour or more before sunrise is one never to be forgotten; many a time did I get up to enjoy it, and each time new beauties revealed themselves. It always reminded me of a picture of the Dutch School in varying gradations of pearly greys. The night has passed, and the cold, clear light of dawn steals over every feature of the scenery. The great snow mountains stand out white and pure against the cloudless sky, in which the morning star still burns; not a touch of pink has yet warmed their silent summits. Reed beds, swathed in gently-moving mist, and long grassy promontories, on which stand motionless cattle, project into the lake in ever-varying outline as the boat glides on, all showing grey in the yet sunless light. The weird call of the water-pheasant sounds on all sides, as the black and white birds, disturbed by the sound of the paddles, wheel over the marshes; and for miles around you stretches the great expanse of water, cool and grey, swept here and there with washes of pale blue, or dark-blue greys where the lake shallows.